

28 June 2016

Ms. Margaret Quirk MLA  
Chair  
Community Development and Justice Standing  
Committee  
PO Box 6085  
Girrawheen, 6064



Dear Ms. Quirk,

**RE: Inquiry into Building Resilience and Engagement for At-Risk Youth Through Sport and Culture**

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) has partnered with the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA) in order to provide a broader insight and knowledge for this inquiry.

Both YACWA and AHCWA would like to thank the Standing Committee on Community Development and Justice for the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry, and appear in front of the committee for a hearing.

YACWA is the peak non-government body representing young people and the youth sector in Western Australia, and over 400 members from across the state (made up of young people, youth services, and youth workers) guide its work.

AHCWA is the peak body for Aboriginal health in Western Australia with 21 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) currently engaged as members and guiding its work.

Both organisations have previously been, and would like to continuously be, involved in policy development with regards to at risk youth and community development in Western Australia.

For the purpose of this feedback, both organisations have looked to analyze programs that incorporate sport into their delivery alongside other components of teaching or skill building leading to resilience.

Both YACWA and AHCWA are of the opinion that engaging at risk young people in regular competition sport is not an effective way of building resilience when done in isolation of other strategies.

In preparing this submission, both organisations have approached more than 30 members and key stakeholders to obtain anecdotal feedback from people and organisations working on the ground. Both AHCWA and YACWA received feedback from the following interested parties:

- Noongar Wellbeing and Sports

- Ignite Basketball
- Save the Children Australia
- Ladder WA
- Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre
- AHCWA members
- YACWA members

This information has been combined with a literature review, and feedback from other submissions to form our response to the Terms of Reference. The details of our analysis are outlined below.

The main points we would like to emphasize are:

- 1) Sport works well as an engagement tool, but most accessible programs are mainstream and do not cater to at risk young people well (although there are examples of specific programs)
- 2) Sport does not build resilience on its own. Beyond the coaches and volunteers involved in sports-based programs, most circumstances require additional skilled professionals, such as youth workers, who are imbedded into sports-based programs to teach life skills, culture and focus on the underlying (often complex) needs of young people in order to achieve outcomes for resilience building.
- 3) Access to funding for programs that use sport to build resilience, and target specific groups of at risk young people, are difficult to obtain and funding is often ad hoc – particularly for local programs targeting at risk young people in regional communities.

*‘For at risk young people in particular, sport can engage and hold attention more than anything at school – and teach a variety of lessons.’*

- Jamie, Ignite Basketball, Armadale

## **1 – What works?**

Both YACWA and AHCWA recognize that often there are a number of barriers to engagement for at risk young people to pass through before being able to be involved in sport or cultural activities. These barriers can be complex and at times out of control of the program administrators. It is essential though that these barriers are minimized to include at risk young people.

However, both YACWA and AHCWA believe that sport, when combined with culture (whether that be youth culture generically, Aboriginal culture or other cultures relevant to the target group) can be an effective way of engaging at risk young people. The following list contains common themes that occur within successful programs:

- Programs that target specific groups of young people in a relevant way to them, and have their interests (often requiring variety of sporting activities) in mind
- Inclusion of other areas of interest and learning alongside sport to build resilience
- Variable timing of delivery to meet target groups needs – often out of business hours, and at relevant locations to the target group
- Relevant relatable youth workers working alongside coaches to address areas of support as they arise, and refer more complex needs to appropriate services.
- Involvement of community leaders from relevant cultures (such as Aboriginal Elders)

It is imperative that programs are consistently run, are community-led with strong community leaders, and are integrated with other areas that address resilience building and restoring pride and self-worth (ie – culture).

*“With every successful program, I’ve found that the key to success is accessing and utilizing well respected mentors or project leaders, to work with the kids throughout the program. These people are more often than not, fully aware of the issues affecting the youngsters”*

- Gail

*“We often use sport as a ‘soft entry’ point to other internal and external services whereby at-risk young people can be guided into more intensive family support and case management services to address underlying causes and risk factors.”*

- Karina, Save the Children Australia

## **2 – Gaps**

Whilst there are examples of great programs currently being run to engage at risk young people across the state, there are also gaps in the consistency of how these programs are run and funded.

Further, engagement with young people to identify wants and needs, and include them in planning of events, programs, or competitions instead of providing programs that they might subscribe to, is an approach that could be better utilized.

For example, in 2008, almost all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (98% or 102,100 people) said that they would like to participate in cultural events and cultural activities<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, any sporting programs should incorporate these elements, and further funding should be directed towards cultural activities.

Some of the gaps identified in our consultation and research include:

- Locally led programs identified and supported by community with strong local leaders
- Accessibility for at risk youth via addressing barriers to them being included, such as: fees, equipment, travel to venues, relationship issues
- Variety of sports and educational delivery to spark interests and maintain young people’s involvement
- Length of funding for programs to build trust and credibility amongst at risk youth
- Additional funding often required to effectively engage at risk youth and limit barriers to inclusion
- Relevant staff members/coaches that are qualified and skilled enough to be able to engage with at risk youth
- Timing of delivery should be targeted to at risk youth – out of hours programs

Both YACWA and AHCWA acknowledge the Department of Sport and Recreation (DSR) currently employs Aboriginal Sport Development Officers (ASDOs) throughout Western Australia through federal funding. It is our understanding that some funding for these positions have been withdrawn. The Department has commenced work on the development

of a new strategy for the delivery of Aboriginal sport and recreation, which will identify DSR's role for the future.

*"It is crucial that we tap into what the young people need and want as opposed to us telling them what they need."*

- Kate, Ladder WA

### **3 – Differences in Metropolitan and regional access to programs**

There are significant differences for young people who are at risk having access to programs that engage them in sport from a regional and metropolitan perspective.

An example of this is the support provided to young people through large metropolitan sport clubs. These clubs have the capacity to support young people through their youth, and assume the role of almost a family member as they seek to develop young leaders. However, young people who reside in regional and remote Western Australia are unlikely to have access to clubs with such capacity.

Young people at risk who live in regional and remote Western Australia have added barriers of:

- Lack of accessibility to programs due to less on offer
- Travel is often required to participate in programs
- Added difficulty to break into established clubs, and little pathways to do so
- Not enough players/people to form their own sporting teams
- Changing staff who coordinate programs
- Out of hours access limited

Whilst these barriers can also be found in some examples in metropolitan regions, they are largely true for young people in the regions. The access to programs incorporating sport and culture on an ongoing basis for at risk young people are also exacerbated by these issues, and a general lack of local programs that are run.

*A strength-based approach with a positive perspective is so much more effective than a no capacity approach and a negative perspective. It's a simple and powerful philosophy – work with the communities many strengths rather than focus on the 'challenges' and problems.*

- Karyn, Noongar Wellbeing and Sport

### **4 – Challenges related to:**

Certain groups of at-risk young people face additional barriers to engagement in services that make them at higher risk of negative circumstances influencing their lives, such as Indigenous, CALD, and young girls.

Both YACWA and AHCWA believe that there are additional groups that should be taken into consideration when designing programs for at risk young people, for example young people living with a disability, young people who are homeless, and those living in regional and remote areas.

### **a) Indigenous**

Young people from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background require additional support in order to address additional barriers with cultural misunderstandings, social isolation, discrimination, historical trauma and poverty, lack of trust in mainstream programs, and limited access to services often due to either distance in remote areas and/or due to a lack of Aboriginal led programs

Further, Aboriginal youth suicide has been a growing concern to both levels of government and in communities. In building the resilience of Aboriginal children and young people, it is critical for programs to seek to address the complex and interrelated historical, political, economic, structural, and social factors that impact their lives. Whilst sport can be one strategy in engaging with this population, it must form part of a holistic approach that places culture and healing at the forefront of program design and evaluation.

As an example, AHCWA, through their Youth Coordinator, facilitated Social and Emotional Wellbeing Workshops across the state in 2015. These workshops sought to work with Aboriginal youth to identify current health issues; discuss cultural healing; provide career advice; and afford opportunities in leadership development. One of the workshops was also exclusively offered to young Aboriginal women. We have attached the subsequent report for the Committee's perusal, as we believe this highlights the importance of collaboration between funding bodies (i.e. our state government) and non-government community-led organisations (such as the Youth sector and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health sector), to address the issues identified by this Inquiry.

### **b) Female**

While we asked for feedback regarding challenges related to being female, we received little input from stakeholders. Anecdotally we had one person say: *"The challenges of being and Aboriginal female are numerous, and varied. One of the main issues being peer pressure to have a boyfriend, start drinking alcohol, have a baby and settle down at a young age with a young teenage boyfriend."*

### **c) Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)**

Similarly to the experience of Aboriginal young people, Young people from a CALD backgrounds require additional support in order to address additional barriers with language, cultural misunderstandings, social isolation, discrimination, lack of trust, limited access to services or interpreters and often being the only ones able to speak fluent English in their families.

Programs targeted at this cohort need to include young people in their program design to ensure what is delivered is both appropriate and engaging.

As an example of working with young people from a CALD background, YACWA has run several projects in the past targeted at young CALD people. These have included the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, the Catalyst Youth Summit, and the Shout Out

project. Central to all of these programs and projects has been consulting with young people from a CALD background as to what is most relevant for them.

## **Conclusion:**

Both YACWA and AHCWA would like to acknowledge the work that the Department of Sport and Recreation has done to address engaging at risk young people through sport. Particularly through the Youth Engagement Scheme and various other target groups.

However, both YACWA and AHCWA believe that there is still more to be done in engaging at risk young people and would like to see:

- More funding for grass roots, community-led programs that incorporate both sport and culture, as well as other elements to build resilience for at risk young people throughout their life-cycle
- Greater collaboration for funding between sports providers, local youth services and local community-controlled health services to provide relevant sport and culture programs
- Expanding the definition of at risk young people to include targeted funding streams/grants for cohorts of at risk young people (e.g. homeless young people, Aboriginal young people, CALD young people).
- Clear criteria established for sport programs that work effectively well in incorporating other elements to build resilience, and a branded recognition/endorsement of their success
- Equitable and consistent funding models across Departments and through the regions for minimum three year periods
- Expansion of support for out of hours programs, delivered in places specific to targeted groups of at risk young people

“Programs need to be constant, reliable and regular, offer variety, focus on engagement, and be context-specific, meaning they should focus on the provision of meaningful, culturally relevant, gender and age status appropriate activities. They should incorporate the involvement, guidance, and support from older family members, and employ skilled youth workers who develop ideas and lead activities<sup>2</sup>.”

If you have any further queries or would like clarification on our position with regards to this inquiry, please do not hesitate to contact YACWA's office on 9227 5440 or via email [ceo@yacwa.org.au](mailto:ceo@yacwa.org.au) or via the post at PO Box 334, Leederville WA 6903.

Regards,



Ross Wortham  
Chief Executive Officer  
Youth Affairs Council of WA



Des Martin  
Chief Executive Officers  
Aboriginal Health Council of WA

---

<sup>1</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing: A focus on children and youth, 2011, Australian Bureau of Statistics.  
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4725.0Chapter240Apr%202011>

<sup>2</sup> Youth Programs in Remote Central Australian Aboriginal Communities, 2013, Flinders University and Charles Darwin University.  
<http://static.squarespace.com/static/50061cbb84ae216bb5cb9339/t/52967ea4e4b0316936dd2293/1385594532245/CRH%20Youth%20report.pdf>